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ABSTRACT

The study investigates the relationship of small district teacher aspirations, career patterns, residential preferences, biographic characteristics, motivations, and perceptions of organizational and community factors to teacher turnover intentions in selected small districts in New Mexico in the spring 1983. The population studied included 262 full-time teachers employed during the 1982-83 school year in the school districts in New Mexico which had a membership of less than 300 students. A total of 231 responses were received (38% male, 62% female, 20% Hispanic, and 79% Anglo/Non-Hispanic). Using mobility intent as the variable, the following was indicated: 75% intended to teach in their present districts during the following year, 11% intended to leave the districts, and 15% were undecided (52% of the respondents were 100% sure of their intentions). A significant relationship was found between mobility intent and marital status, career goal, and location of previous service in other districts. Recommendations include that administrators wishing to reduce turnover rates should: recruit teachers with community ties or those who would be likely to develop positive ties; and consider the prospective teachers' career goals. (AH)

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Small District Teacher Study

Executive Summary

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Preface

One of the most pressing problems facing rural schools today is that of teacher turnover. Many new teachers receive their first few years of experience in the small rural schools and then move to larger schools as experienced teachers. For many years the small rural schools have served as apprenticeship centers for education.

The purpose of this study was to determine some of the reasons that teachers left the small schools. This information should be helpful in order that the schools could select those teachers that are more likely to stay in the small rural schools.

Small District Teacher Study

Executive Summary

This summary reports the results of a study conducted under the auspices of the Center for Rural Education at New Mexico State University during the spring of 1983. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship of small district teacher aspirations, career patterns, residential preferences, biographic characteristics, motivations, and perceptions of organizational and community factors to teacher turnover intentions in selected small districts in New Mexico.

The population studied was the 262 full-time teachers employed during the 1982-1983 school year in the school districts in New Mexico which had a membership of less than 300 students.

The questionnaire which was developed with the help of professors of educational administration and rural education experts was distributed to the small district teachers by their superintendents during the month of February 1983. The findings which are presented in the following pages are based upon 231 responses, representing an 88 percent return rate for the questionnaire.

The results of the study show that the respondents were 38 percent male and 62 percent female. Nineteen percent had one year of service in the present district and over half had five or fewer years of service. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents were Anglo, Nonhispanic, while slightly over 20 percent were Hispanic.

The criterion variable for the study was mobility intent. Seventy-five percent of the respondents intended to teach in their present district during the following school year. Eleven percent of all teachers

intended to leave the district and 15 percent were undecided. Fifty-two percent of the respondents were 100 percent sure of their intentions, while 31 percent were 75 percent sure of their intentions. The remainder were either 50 percent sure or uncertain.

A significant relationship was found between mobility intent and the marital status of the teacher. Single teachers showed a desire to leave the district in a greater proportion than did their married counterparts. Age, gender, race/ethnicity, and other biographic characteristics showed little relationship to whether a teacher would leave or stay.

The career goal of a teacher showed a significant relationship to mobility intent. Teachers intending to stay listed goals which were generally directed toward teaching in the present position, school administration, and counseling. Those intending to leave most often listed goals of teaching in a different location and school administration or counseling.

A significant relationship was demonstrated between mobility intent and the location of previous service in other districts. Teachers intent upon staying tended to have experience in only rural districts. Those intent upon leaving often reported experience in both rural and urban districts. No significant relationship was demonstrated between mobility intent and the following variables: years in present district, size of high school respondent graduated from, education level, size of college attended, college grade average, employment other than education, time spent at an occupation other than education and number of years of service in other school districts.

The average length of service to the district surveyed was 7.5 years. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents had five or fewer years of service.

Among those intent upon leaving, 72 percent had five or fewer years of service.

Almost half of the small district teachers had graduated from small high schools. Thirty-six percent of the leavers graduated from large high schools, whereas only 20 percent of all teachers graduated from large high schools. Although not statistically significant, a positive relationship was noted between membership in the stayer intent category and backgrounds which included small institutions and rural settings.

The most common reason among all teachers for coming to the district was that it was close to home, the hometown, or family location. Other commonly mentioned reasons for coming to the district were "spouse's employment" and "I like small towns." A trend was noted in that a much greater percentage of stayers were motivated by home and family location than leavers. As compared to the stayers, a larger portion of the leavers came to the district because the position was the only one available.

When asked to state their preference from among the responses of large cities, large towns, small towns, and rural settings, 42 percent of all respondents chose rural settings. Thirty-six percent chose small towns. There were marked differences in preference among intent groups. Forty percent of the leavers liked large cities and towns, while only 18 percent of the stayers shared this preference. Forty percent of the stayers preferred small towns while only 16 percent of the leavers did so. Stayer preference was centered around small towns while leaver preference was centered around larger places.

The final section of the questionnaire dealt with the teacher's job and community satisfaction.

Differences in group means were sought among measures of supervision of instruction, working conditions, school administration, instructional program, personal assignment, interpersonal relationships, student characteristics, board of education, teaching staff, and community relations.

Significant mean differences between leaver and stayer groups were discovered in the investigation of the following aspects: school administration, instructional program, and community conditions. Satisfaction ratings were generally good for all groups, with few mean ratings falling below the midpoint of the satisfaction scale. Consistently higher satisfaction was reported among stayers than the leavers. Greater mean differences in satisfaction ratings were evident between stayers and leavers over job-related items, as opposed to community conditions. Particularly evident was a significant difference in mean satisfaction levels among leavers and stayers over relationships with the administration and students.

Small district teachers found high levels of satisfaction over class size, relations with students, and relations with other teachers. They expressed the lowest levels of satisfaction over the availability of medical care, the distance to shopping, and the academic standards of the district.

To sum up, the study supported the notion that those who teach in rural areas and intend to stay in one place have roots in the area or in rural life. Specific conclusions are presented in the following section.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were reached by a logical extension of the findings of the study to small district situations:

1. Teachers intent upon staying in a given small district were motivated to come to that district most often by its proximity to home and

family. Few of the leavers were bound to the community by home and family. One of the oft-cited reasons that those who would leave the district had for coming to it was that no other job was available.

2. Teachers intent upon leaving a given small district are more likely to be single than married. The characteristics of age, gender, and racial/ethnic group are not significantly associated with the turnover decision.

3. Teachers who have been hired in a small district are most likely to leave within the first five years of service.

4. Although a large portion of both stayers and leavers preferred rural settings to the city, relatively more stayers preferred small towns and villages. Relatively more leavers preferred large towns.

5. Aside from teaching in a different position, many of the leavers intended to go into counseling or administration. Those teachers who have ambitions for advancement must either leave to find a position or wait for one to open up.

6. Satisfaction with job and community was higher for stayers than for leavers. Leavers expressed less satisfaction with the administration, the instructional program, and community conditions. Specifically, leavers had little satisfaction with the academic standards of the district and support for teachers by the administration. Leavers also found little satisfaction with the image of teachers in the community, the availability of medical care, and the distance to shopping.

Recommendations

In the course of the study, several findings were thought to be important enough to warrant action to further address the problem of teacher turnover in small districts. Accordingly, the following recommendations are presented:

1. Administrators wishing to reduce turnover rates would do well to recruit teachers with positive community ties. Such action might involve the community and present teaching force to help recruit teachers. Interviews should include questions about motivation for coming to the district.

2. Administrators should recruit teachers who would be likely to develop positive ties with the community. Single teachers should be selected on the basis of whether they can adapt to conditions in the community.

3. Administrators of districts far removed from medical services should alert prospective teachers, especially those with small children, to the hardships involved in securing medical care.

4. Administrators should take into consideration the career goal of the teacher when selecting among prospective teachers. Those intent upon rapid advancement should be considered at risk to turnover.